

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 1963

Men, Women And Their Careers

Who remembers the year 1910, when the Queenscliff Council paid 1/- for each 100 sparrows eggs delivered to the town hall? Frederick William Stevens, M.B.E., was one of the boys who rushed in breathless and ran out-happily with the piece of silver.

Mr Stevens retired recently from the Public Service. He was one of the boys of the district who walked on Saturday mornings during the nesting season, from Point Lonsdale to Queenscliff, with his weekly collection of sparrows eggs.

At that time, he lived with his parents and brother and sister (now Mrs. Wilson, of Ocean Grove), at the Point Lonsdale lighthouse, where his father was light-house keeper. He attended State School 3322 at the Springs.

Soon, as was the common practice, the Stevens family moved to the Cape Schank lighthouse, where Fred attended the half-time school at the Blacks Camp Junction. It was here that he was called upon to make his own way in the world.

His first job was that of temporary telegraph messenger at the Dromana Post Office. Later, having passed an examination, he was appointed permanently to the Postmaster-General's Department at Flinders.

In 1915, he resigned from the department and served for several years in the Royal Australian Navy. During this period, he saw service in the war zones of the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

He was in Papua when the 1914-18 war came to a close, and remained there until 1920, when he returned to Victoria after a continuous absence of more than three years.

Two years later, this wanderer spent seven months with two other men at the Willis Island Meteorological Station. During this time, the three men lived on rations taken to the island in the steamer which landed them there, and sighted no other soul.

The year 1923 ushered in the broadcasting era. From wireless communications, Mr. Stevens moved into this new entertainment field and served at the first 2FC in Sydney, the first 3LO in Melbourne, and the first 4QG in Brisbane, where he was the chief engineer and deputy director.

Always on the look-out for new avenues of employment, in 1929, he commenced a flying trainee course, but the depression which came to a peak about 1931-32 put a temporary stop to this interest.

It was not until 1934, having obtained a commercial pilot's licence, a first-class flight radio operator's licence and a navigator's licence, that it was possible for him to take an active part in commercial flying.

He was a crew member of the first official air-mail aircraft to fly from Australia to Singapore and return.

By 1937, aviation in Australia was beginning to emerge from the infancy stage. At that time, the Civil Aviation Board of the Defence Department administered such regulations, as existed, in the interest of safe flying.

It was to this board that Mr. Stevens transferred, becoming in the process the board's first Radio Inspector.

With the creation of the new Department of Civil Aviation in 1940, this man of many interests again was appointed to the Commonwealth Public Service after an absence of 23 years.

Australia at this time was at war again and, although Mr. Stevens had been on the Reserve of Officers, RAAF, and was called up for service at the commencement of hostilities, the call-up was deferred for the time being because his services were more important in civil aviation activities.

He was, however, seconded to Qantas and sent to the United States to assist in ferrying Catalina flying boats from the factory at Santiago to Australia.

On his first flight, he was aboard the first aircraft ever to fly from Suva to Sydney.

Later, the call-up for service was effected, whereupon he was posted to Allied Air Force headquarters, as a staff officer, signals, where he remained until the end of hostilities and saw service in various parts of Australia, in New Guinea, and at Morotai in the Halmaheras.

Mr. Stevens returned to civil aviation, served in Queensland and New South Wales and finally at the head office of the Department of Civil Aviation, in Melbourne.

Earlier this year, he was retired from the Public Service.

"In recognition of his service to civil aviation, the Queen, during her visit to Melbourne, appointed Mr. Stevens a Member of the Order of the British Empire (Civil Division).